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Address of H. B. McIlwaine, Ph. D., State  
Librarian, delivered at the College of William  
and Mary upon the dedication of the New  
Library Building, May 13, 1909



## *History of the Library at the College of William and Mary*

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**T**HERE is perhaps, despite the general neglect and injuries of fire and war, more evidences of refinement in Colonial Virginia, preserved by means of costly tombs, book-plates, and records of libraries than in any other of the colonies. John Eliot had the most comprehensive library in New England between 1713 and 1745, but Eliot's library was largely exceeded by the libraries of William Byrd, Richard Lee, William Dunlop and others in Virginia. As shown by the inventories of estates from the earliest times every independent planter was the possessor of a few books. Soon after the foundation of the College in 1693, the beginning was made of a library, but this first collection perished in 1705, when the main library building was injured by fire. The collection was started anew after the restoration was begun.

Hugh Jones in his *PRESENT STATE OF VIRGINIA* tells us in 1723 that the College had a small library enriched of late by the kind gifts of several gentlemen, but the sets of books were not all perfect nor of the best quality. In 1729 Sir John Randolph was authorized to make a purchase of books for the library in London. In 1734 the General Assembly of Virginia gave the College the duty of one penny per gallon on liquors imported, provided that some part thereof should be spent in books. A book with the printed label "The Gift of the General Assembly of Virginia in the year 1734" is still preserved in the College Library. Soon after this the Earl of Burlington presented the portrait and works of his brother—the eminent philosopher and philanthropist, Hon. Robert Boyle. In 1743 occurred the death of Dr. James Blair, President of the College, and thereupon his library came into the possession of the College. It is said to have contained "many good editions of the Fathers." A few books were presented by Governors Spotswood, Gooch, Fauquier, Dinwiddie and Dunmore, and by bishops and archbishops of England. About 1783 came a gift from King Louis XVI. of France of about 500 books. In 1781 the number of books in the library was estimated at 3,000. The collection grew slowly by gift or purchase, and in 1859 numbered 8,000 books—not counting pamphlets and manuscripts. Many of the editions were very valuable, and among the manuscripts was the original surveyor's license granted George Washington in 1749, which the authorities prized highly and had framed and hung on the Library walls. The Library was then in the upper part of the north wing of the College over the chemical laboratory.

On February 8, 1859, the College caught fire, and in the flames which consumed the building the collection of one hundred and fifty years perished almost completely, including the commission to General Washington.

In a year's time the College was again restored, and the new Library started with about 6,000 volumes obtained partly by purchase and partly by the donations of public spirited individuals. But the war for Southern independence soon breaking out, this number was not largely increased. In 1862 the main building was set on fire by Federal troops, but the books in the Library and the six portraits in the Faculty room had been removed fortunately to the President's house and were preserved.

After the restoration of the main building in 1867 the Library was located in the south wing adjoining the chapel and separated from it by folding doors, thus enabling the two to form one hall on public occasions. In 1881 the College suspended work for want of funds, and, when it started again in 1888, under the auspices of the Legislature, the collection did not exceed 8,000 volumes exclusive of pamphlets. It then began to grow quite rapidly, and in 1905 the collection amounted to about 15,000 volumes.

In the latter year a movement was started by President Lyon G. Tyler for more commodious quarters. Mr. Andrew Carnegie agreed to contribute \$20,000 for upbuilding provided \$20,000 new endowments for "its maintenance and upkeep" was raised. This was accomplished chiefly through the munificence of George Clinton Batcheller, of New York; Joseph Bryan, of Richmond; R. Fulton Cutting, of New York, and Thomas Nelson Page, of Virginia. Then the fund was further increased by Mrs. Sarah B. Van Ness, of East Lexington, Mass., and Mr. Edward W. James of Norfolk, Virginia. Mrs. Herbert B. Claiborne contributed \$1,000 for the purchase of Virginia books. The new building for the accommodation of the Library was completed in 1908, and is of brick with stone trimmings; it is eighty feet in length by thirty feet in breadth with a stack room attached. It contains about 20,000 printed and manuscript volumes, some of the latter of much interest—such as the original journal of the Phi Beta Kappa Society from 1776 to 1781, the Faculty books, etc. It is adorned with many portraits of eminent alumni and interesting engravings of distinguished scenes and persons.

On Friday, April 13, 1908, the corner stone was laid with appropriate exercises, and on Friday, May 14, 1909, the Library was opened to the public. On the latter occasion the State Librarian, H. R. McIlwaine, was present and made an interesting address, well worthy of preservation and publication.



## *Introductory Remarks of President Tyler*

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—

I am very happy to welcome you here this morning. We are met to celebrate the opening of our new College Library, which means so much to our ancient Institution. On such an occasion when there is so much cause present to us for congratulation, I may be excused for briefly reviewing our development during the last twenty-one years. In 1888, the funds of the Institution, after payments of debts, did not exceed \$20,000, and, because of its inability to support a faculty, the doors of the College had been closed for seven years. The buildings were only five in number, and they were out of repair and were without any of the modern improvements. I remember the condition of one of the dormitories, the Brafferton building particularly. During the war this building, like the courthouse and other buildings in Williamsburg, were deprived of every particle of wooden material including the framework and the sashes to the windows to furnish quarters for the Federal officers at Fort Magruder. It still retained this melancholy aspect, when the college opened in 1888, and seemed more like a brick skeleton than a dormitory. The roof of the main College building looked very badly. The paths were dirt ways covered with grass. Our accommodations were of the most primitive character. The rooms were lighted with oil lamps, heated by stoves, and water was obtained from wells, which could not keep out surface water. The lecture rooms were furnished with benches, and the apparatus was scanty and insufficient.

At the present writing, 1909, the invested endowment fund is \$154,000 and the College receives annually \$40,000 from the State, which together represents an endowment fund of nearly \$1,000,000. During the present session the College has nearly twice as many students as it ever had in its most prosperous days before the war. There are now eleven buildings, all in

good condition, well equipped, heated for the most part with steam, lighted with electricity and supplied with the purest sort of water from an artesian well. The college grounds are three times more extensive than they were in 1888. They have been surrounded with new fences, and granolithic walks have taken the place of the old dirt paths. The corps of instructors number about 30 where at no time previous to 1888 did the number exceed ten. The College maintains an observation and practice school which is attended by upwards of 130 children. A sewer system has been put in, and the College has the means of meeting and conquering the old enemy fire, to which the main building has succumbed no less than three times. Three years ago we celebrated the opening of our new Science Hall. Today the Library, which contained but 7,000 books in 1888, and which contains now upwards of 18,000, has a new home and a new resting place. We rejoice at this new addition to our Institution; for we regard it as an inspiration and a proof of still better things in store for the College we love. I might in my limited way tell you something of the value of a Library to the Professor and to the student, but as we have one with us today who can do this part much better I will leave this work entirely to him. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you the Dean of our Librarians, Dr. H. R. McIlwaine, custodian of the Virginia State Library, who knows much about books and has promised me to give us some of his valuable information.

## *The Reading Habit*

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MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—

Before beginning the discussion of the topic which I have chosen for treatment today, I wish to express my great gratification in being permitted to take part in the exercises incident to the opening of the building that from this day forth is to be one of the centers of the intellectual life of this college. There are, I suppose, few Virginians who have even a superficial knowledge of the history of their native State who do not take the greatest pride in the past achievements of William and Mary College, and who do not rejoice in the great things she is at present accomplishing and in the promises she makes for the future. These feelings I share with the great body of Virginia people; but in me I think they are perhaps intensified by the fact that at least one of my ancestors was educated at William and Mary, and that the most admired instructor at whose feet I was privileged to sit during my university career, the inspiring teacher and widely read scholar, Dr. H. B. Adams, up to the time of his lamented death the professor of history in the Johns Hopkins University, wrote, though "not native here nor to the manner born," being by birth and training a New Englander of the strictest sect, a brief history of William and Mary College (which was published in 1887), and never failed during the time that I was closely associated with him to improve every opportunity to refer in terms of enthusiastic admiration to the part played by William and Mary in the training of many of the great leaders of the Revolution. I am glad, therefore, to have the opportunity of visiting the place of which I have both heard and read so much, and especially of visiting it at a time of such rejoicing as the present.

The topic which has seemed to me to be an appropriate one for the presentation of this occasion is the importance of the acquisition of the reading-habit by those who have not yet gone forth into the battle of life, but who are still buckling on their armor. A part of what I shall say will not pertain to the



topic merely so far as it relates especially to college students, but will have in view as well as those who are in the preparatory schools. This I hope, however, will not seem out of place to an audience so many of whom will be called upon to engage in preparatory school instruction. I wish to say, too, at the outset, that in my use of the word "reading" it has some of the connotation usually given to the word "study." When I say that a person should acquire a fondness for reading, I mean, of course, reading that closely approximates study—reading in which the intelligence is active and alert. Without this, the exercise degenerates into a mere eye-service which is of little or no value except in so far as it occupies time that might otherwise be given over to harmful practices.

The period in which a young man, to use the language of every day life, is "getting his education," is, of course, one merely of preparation. He is preparing himself to play his appropriate part on the great stage of life. Now, leaving the future life out of consideration, and looking at the matter merely from the point of view of the life which we see here in this world, we may tentatively classify the duties which the young man will be called upon to perform as the three following, these being given in the order of what I consider their relative importance:—First, to make a living for himself and those dependent on him; second, to enjoy the innocent pleasures of life and to fortify himself against its trials and disappointments, to the end that he do not wear himself out before his time and so cheat himself, his family, and society at large of a part of the good work which normally he might be expected to do; and third, to work for the advancement of society at large in all the numerous ways that may be presented to him.

To any who may be inclined to criticise the order in which I have named these duties, seeing that I have put the duties to society last instead of first, I say that even from the point of view of those who think that the individual should live for society rather than for himself the order given is in my opinion really correct, for each individual is merely a component of the whole body which is called society, and when he advances the interests of the part he necessarily advances the interests of the whole. Rightly apprehended, there is in the long run



no conflict between the two. And, in addition, so far as his fellow men are concerned, such a man is very probably teaching far more powerfully by example than he could by precept. Remember what Shakespeare says:

"To thine own self be true;  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

The principle here announced is absolutely correct, the errors arising sometimes from its application resulting from the fact that those who apply it are ignorant of their true interests; but happily, as the world grows older, this ignorance is day by day diminishing.

Hear Shakespeare also on the relative value of precept and example: "If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces; it is a good divine that follows his own instructions: I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching."

I repeat, therefore, ladies and gentlemen, that even if the promotion of the good of society is a man's main object in life, the accomplishment of this object will much more likely result from strict attention to what might seem to some to be solely the man's own individual affairs, but which in truth, owing to the solidarity of society, affect all; and by sternly refraining on most occasions of temptation from preaching to his neighbors, solacing himself with the reflection that though his tongue be silent yet his example speaketh. When in the ninety-ninth case he allows himself the dissipation of speech, let him remember that this avails to effect reform in the great majority of cases only as it is added to known correct conduct.

If any are dissatisfied, however, with the above classification of duties, it does not very greatly matter. We may leave the work of making a more philosophical one to others. The one which I have given is sufficient for our present purposes. The boy at school and later the young man at college is fitting himself under the guidance of his instructors to perform his duties in life; and it is to the one feature of this preparation that I desire to call your attention for a while this morning.

Undoubtedly one of the most striking advances made in educational methods in this country in the last thirty or forty years consists in the extended use of libraries as an aid to the study of text-books. Not many years ago the college and the university libraries were places infrequently visited by students at the various institutions of learning in the land. I have here in my hand a very interesting book. It contains the laws of William and Mary College for 1792. Turning to page 7, I find the following in reference to the library: "No student shall apply for a book, except on Mondays and Fridays, and then application shall be made to the Librarian, between the hours of 9 and 10 in the morning." You see from this that the library was opened only two hours a week. But for a long time after this, not only at William and Mary College but at all the other institutions of learning in the country, the number of hours for which the libraries were open was few, and even during these the students were not encouraged to attend, for there was a feeling of jealousy on the part of the members of the faculty toward the library as being an institution having a tendency to attract the members of their classes from the compulsory work of the college curriculum. Those were the days when the text-book was an idol, and the student who carefully devoted his whole time to the worship of this idol was the one who carried off the honors. Now all this has been changed. This is the day of an alliance between the library and the faculty. The library is open all day long; and in an up-to-date institution the librarian and his assistants are apt to be hard worked officials. The explanation of this great change is in large part that each of our institutions has to the extent of its ability adopted what is known as the seminary method of instruction—the great contribution of Germany to the educational world—a method according to which the professor in any department of the university or even the college (for this method is now being employed to a greater or less degree in all our higher institutions of learning and to some extent even in the preparatory schools) leads his students to investigate a subject rather than merely to memorize a text-book. Truth is acknowledged frankly to be many sided, not to be fully described within the covers of any one or two text-books; and

the students are encouraged to get the opinions of more writers than one, to read many books—in other words, to search for this truth up and down the library.

Under the old method the student who made 90 or 95 per cent. on an examination on the professor's favorite text-book had an idea that he knew all there ought to be known about the subject. Therefore he dropped it, and straightway on leaving college he forgot even that he thought he knew. On the other hand, under the new regime the student acquires not so much a body of facts as an attitude of mind and a habit of study—the attitude being one of tolerance and sympathy, and the habit one of patient investigation. Few will deny that the new method is infinitely the better. It must be admitted, however, that long before the seminary method was adopted in this country we did not absolutely lack for students who after leaving the colleges and universities developed into investigators and advanced the realms of knowledge, and graduates who had formed the habit of reading many books; but it is contended that these cases were exceptional,—products shaped by other influences than the prevailing one to be met with in the educational centers. Nor is it contended that now when the new method widely prevails all the men who come from the universities are investigators. Far from it. In this world, for the accomplishment of good lasting results men and method must meet. Method by itself accomplishes nothing. It is merely contended that a much greater number of the men now turned out by the universities are real students.

Though I believe that the wide adoption of this German seminary method of instruction (or, perhaps, I should better say, of leading students to learn) is mainly responsible for the enlarged use of our university and college libraries, and, too, for the establishment of school libraries, for in all human affairs the principle of imitation prevails (the inferior in rank being largely affected by the example of the superior), I think that there has always been at work as a subsidiary influence the recognition of the fact that institutions of learning, both great and small, both the universities with their full-fledged seminars and the old-field schools with their grim drill-masters,



are all preparing the youth of our land, not only for professions and vocations, but for life in all its complexity. It is recognized by most instructors that if only the school or the college or the university (whichever institution has the last chance with the boy or young man before he steps upon the larger stage of life) can only send him forth with a fondness for reading good books, it has conferred on him the very greatest benefit that could possibly be bestowed. In comparison, mere information is as nothing, for much of this, however toilsomely and painfully acquired, will soon become obsolete, or will have slipped from the student's memory; but his fondness for reading will enable him to replace it with that which is up-to-date, if it be necessary for him in his calling (whatever this may be) to collect a certain body of facts, or if we have a passion for facts merely as an intellectual possession. And, of far greater value, it enables him to make pleasing and profitable use of a leisure that might, without this resource, be passed in idleness or dissipation. Finally, it furnishes him with a means of consolation in hours of depression and affliction, a means of meeting with some composure the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that assail all—even those who to outward view are most fortunate. In these days of the secularization of education, when religious instruction may not be given in the schools (certainly not in the public schools or in the undenominational college or university), it behooves those to whom is committed the guidance of the young to labor earnestly to provide them with a means of comfort in time of trouble which is scarcely inferior in potency to religion itself—in the case of many, of even great power—a fondness for the more exalted forms of literature. One who has this fondness can at will enter with Keats the “realms of gold,” or with Southey say—

“My days among the dead are past;  
Around me I behold,  
Where'er these casual eyes are cast,  
The mighty minds of old:  
My never failing friends are they  
With whom I converse day by day.”



But whatever may be the cause of the increased use of libraries by students at our higher educational institutions, the fact that this increase is patent to all observers, and it is now considered necessary by many that even the preparatory schools should have their libraries. I heartily concur in this opinion. The sooner the child is brought into contact with books, the better. The children of well-to-do parents are apt to have a few books, bought for them, but if the desired end is accomplished in making of the child a reader, the home collection must be supplemented in a short time by the larger school collection; and in the case of the poorer children, perhaps the necessity for the school collection may exist at the very start. With both classes of children there will exist the necessity that some one lead them by the hand. In my opinion, in each room in the school the teacher should devote from one-half to three-quarters of an hour daily to reading to the children some interesting book suited to the degree of their intellectual maturity, with the sole object of leading the children to become readers themselves. The pupils should be encouraged in every way to borrow the books for home use. If the children can be induced readily to talk about what they have read, a point is gained, for they thus have an exercise in expression as well as in reading; but the greatest care should be taken not to worry a diffident child about this, since his indisposition to talk may be so great as to lead him to refuse to borrow a second book. At this stage the object is merely to induce the child to read. Possibly the talking may come later; but if it never comes, it does not greatly matter. This process of enticing the children to read should be kept up as long as they are at school, and they should be kept at school if possible until they become readers. Success is almost sure to come in every case. Heredity may fight against it and so may home environment, but the school environment may be made such, with books beautiful in appearance and attractive in substance, and teachers enthusiastic in the contest, that victory will result at last. And what a victory! The boy has acquired a habit that will enable him to remain at school in a sense his whole life—only the school will be the world of books.

Some teachers that I have seen, object to this program, on the ground that at school the children should be made to study—not allowed to read. Well, for all except the time openly devoted to reading, I should say, too, that they ought by all means to be trained to close study; but the reading habit is so vastly important and it is one so unlikely in the case of most children to be formed unless carefully prepared for and nurtured that I think part of the school time may with the greatest propriety be spent as indicated. If time after school hours were to be devoted to the exercise and the children politely invited to attend, only a few, and they not the ones whom it is so important to influence, would accept. If attendance were made compulsory, only harm would probably result, the children conceiving the idea that they were being treated unfairly, and with this idea a disgust for the whole program. But looking at the matter merely from the view-point of utility so far as the general work of the school is immediately concerned, I believe that the time so spent in encouraging the formation of the reading habit will be most profitably spent. For the child who reads for pleasure learns to read rapidly. When he takes up his text-books, he gets the ideas much more rapidly and surely than his non-reading class-mate. The words and expressions used are familiar to him. Consequently he is able to pluck out the heart of the mystery of the whole recitation assigned in a time that seems incredible to his companion, who is compelled to plod painfully, word by word, through the pages. When a boy is reading for pleasure, he learns the meaning of words with little effort, and he is apt to retain them. When he commences a book, there may be in it a good many words the meanings of which are not clear to him, but he will probably know nearly all of them by the time the book is finished,—and this without the constant aid of the dictionary. In the book, the same word will be used several times (probably many times), each time in a different context, and the meanings of all the surrounding words the boy may already know. For example, the word may be a noun: on the first page it may be the subject of a verb whose meaning is clear to him; on the second page it may be the object of a verb that he knows; on the third page



it may be modified by an adjective, an old acquaintance. The chances are that sooner or later the meaning which will fit fairly well in all cases will flash upon his mind. The puzzle is solved. The vocabulary of the boy who reads is necessarily greater than that of his non-reading brother; he has livelier imagination, and is likely to be quicker witted in every way. Hence from the point of view of the teacher who wishes to convert his pupils into successful students while they are at school this program is advantageous.

But there are other advantages greater still. Years ago Lord Bacon wrote in his Essay of Studies, *Studia abeunt in mores*, which may be freely translated: Reading affects character. The young boy who reads of worthy deeds actually performed by the great ones of history or imagined by their creators to have been performed by the great characters of prose, fiction or poetry, is not unlikely to be stirred by an impulse to do likewise, which may in time become a desire, and then a determination. The Athenians were certainly wise in limiting the requirements made of their children for the first few years of their school course to learning the Iliad and the Odyssey.

What I have said up to the present point in advocacy of the acquirement of the reading habit in the period of preparation for the larger life beyond the school or college or university, has reference rather to the first two classes of duties enumerated at the beginning of this paper,—namely, first, the duty of providing a support for one's self and family, and second, the duty of living as pleasantly as may be and as little depressed as possible by the trials that come to all. The third duty, you remember, is the one of engaging in the various enterprises the object of which is the advancement of society as a whole. It seems almost unnecessary to point out the fact that the man who has been taught to read and who does read widely will learn from his reading in what ways to endeavor to assist his neighbors, and hence will be much more tactful and successful in the role than his non-reading companion. His reading in sociology will teach him how far it is prudent to follow his philanthropic instincts. His efforts accordingly, will not be abortive, or worse result in undermining his neigh-

bor's independence and thus in degrading him. His reading in history, political science, and economics will enable him to form sane judgments as to the merits of the thousand and one schemes advocated by social reformers for the betterment of mankind. The widely read man is the sane man, the wise man. The Roman governor who said to St. Paul, "Much learning hath made thee mad," was, please remember, not inspired. Much learning never made any man mad. The conjunction of learning and insanity sometimes seen is accidental merely; there is no causal connection whatever between the two. Rather, a causal connection may be demonstrated between learning and complete sanity. True learning means knowledge of a thing not as an isolated fact but in its relations, whether causal or other, to all the things with which it is connected—the knowledge of its genesis, its constitution, its operation, its effect. Lord Tennyson, therefore, erred when he said

"Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers."

Complete knowledge is bound to bring wisdom, for wisdom is merely the ability to use certain agents in such a way as to effect a desired result, and if one's knowledge of the agents and all the surrounding circumstances is full and exact, it seems to me that it necessarily follows that his use of these agents will be correct. Lord Tennyson should have said, of course expressing the idea metrically: Our knowledge is still incomplete, and therefore wisdom is not yet with us.

But possibly this discussion is getting somewhat too metaphysical; and certainly I feel that your speaker is scarcely exhibiting his own wisdom in presuming to differ in opinion with the very great writer who has just been quoted. Let us return, accordingly, to less debatable ground. It seems to me that having in view all the duties enumerated as being those which he should look forward to fulfilling when he goes out into the world, the young man should beyond all other acquisitions strive in his days of preparation to acquire a fondness for the thoughtful reading of the best literature. The reading habit is of such paramount importance that it may almost be said to be the one thing needful. The man who has this habit of reading widely and at the same time thoughtfully



can, I think, be depended on to act correctly in all circumstances of life. Then, too, such a man is prevented from becoming fossilized; his mind is ever young, ever alert; and far beyond the age of usefulness allowed by Dr. Ostler in his much discussed address delivered some years ago in Baltimore, and even far beyond the Biblical term of three score years and ten, he may, if providentially the soundness of his physical constitution prevent the decay of his strength for yet a while, march on intellectually conquering and to conquer to the end of his lengthened career, as did, in the memory of most of us here gathered, William E. Gladstone in England and Leopold von Ranke in Germany, of the latter of whom it is recorded that at the advanced age of eighty-nine he was working assiduously to complete his monumental universal history in order that he might resume those special investigations in history for which he was so eminently fitted.

It is my earnest wish that from these walls may go forth many who, having acquired here a fondness for books, may continue into a like honorable old age the pursuit of knowledge, the acquisition of knowledge, and the beneficial use of knowledge, that characterized the remarkable men whom I have just mentioned, and that they may gain for themselves and this old institution—old in years but young in methods—a similar meed of renown.





